Unit .34

Session .01

Persevering in the Mission

Scripture

Acts 19:1-10, 18-20

1 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples **2** and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" "No," they told him, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." **3** "Into what then were you baptized?" he asked them. "Into John's baptism," they replied. **4** Paul said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Jesus." **5** When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. **6** And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. **7** Now there were about twelve men in all. In the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus **8** Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly over a period of three months, arguing and persuading them about the kingdom of God. **9** But when some became hardened and would not believe, slandering the Way in front of the crowd, he withdrew from them, taking the disciples, and conducted discussions every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. **10** This went on for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord ... **18** And many who had become believers came confessing and disclosing their practices, **19** while many of those who had practiced magic collected their books and burned them in front of everyone. So they calculated their value and found it to be fifty thousand pieces of silver. **20** In this way the word of the Lord spread and prevailed.

Intro Options

Main Point:
The Holy Spirit transforms our lives through the gospel.

Remember, this icon means there is a Leader Pack item that goes with the lesson. See Leader Pack for additional instructions.

Option 1

Most comedies, especially romantic comedies, are built on a premise of miscommunication: someone gets the wrong message from someone else, and hilarity ensues as that misunderstanding continues. Resolution comes when clarity finally unravels the knot of miscommunication.

Your student group should pretend they work for a major motion picture studio and come up with the premise for a comedy based on some misconception or miscommunication. If they have the time and talent, they can storyboard the film or even act out a trailer. Give them a few moments to come up with premises and share them. You can vote on which one is best or come up with possible resolutions for those miscommunications.

In today's session, we'll see a misconception about the gospel held by the Ephesians—one which Paul would unravel for them. In the same way, we should bring clarity to misunderstandings people hold about the good news of Jesus. How might people be confused about the gospel today, and how can we correct those confusions?

Option 2

Break your kids into pairs and give each pair an index card and a writing utensil. They are to come up with and write down a brief story with two components:

First, someone (a group of people) trying to achieve a goal: it could be people trying to start a business, a guy working up the courage to ask a girl to prom, a cat trying to reach some catnip on a high shelf, etc.

Second, an obstacle has arisen to prevent the person or people from achieving that goal: maybe the business's building has burned, or another guy has asked the girl out, or the shelf is too high for the cat.

Once the stories are written, then collect all the cards. Hand the cards back out in random order to your students. With the card they have now, they should figure out one of three options: fight, flight, or fail.

Fight: they somehow tackle the problem head on. For example, they try to rebuild the building, or the boy asks the girl out even though another guy has already asked her, or the cat tries to jump to the shelf.

Flight: they work around the obstacle to accomplish the goal with lateral thinking. The business decides to operate out of a truck instead of the building; the guy asks another girl out; the cat gets another snack elsewhere.

Failure: they flat out give up and admit the obstacle is too hard to overcome; the business never opens, the guy never asks the girl, and the cat just decides to take a nap.

Have students share what strategy they came up with. In today's session, we'll see Paul run into an obstacle when he is slandered out of a synagogue. We'll see how he didn't fight, but persisted in his mission by "flighting" to another location to preach.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 19:1-7

The Scriptures tell us more about the church of Ephesus than almost any other church in the New Testament. Paul sent the believers in Ephesus a letter, the apostle John gave them instructions in Revelation 2, and Luke included them in the story of Paul's missionary journeys in the Book of Acts. Paul's ministry in Ephesus began when he encountered these twelve men (v. 7). They believed what they had already heard of God's message, but their understanding of the gospel was still incomplete. There was a big gap in their gospel—the reality and role of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.

- **Have you heard of the Holy Spirit? If so, what is your understanding of the Holy Spirit?**

God is a personal being who eternally exists in three persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. The Holy Spirit, then, is not an impersonal force. The Spirit is a *who*, not a what. Just as the Father sent the Son, so the Father and Son sent the Spirit to dwell within us. God gives His Spirit to all who believe in Jesus as a confirmation that we are His children and as a down payment of our future inheritance. Through Him we are born again, set apart, and empowered to live for Christ.

- **What was the evidence in verse 6 that the believers had received the Holy Spirit?**

Luke recorded that they spoke in tongues and prophesied. The key here is that their inward change was manifested outwardly in their lives. Although there is ongoing debate about whether this particular kind of outward manifestation is normal today, there is no debating the fact that when you have truly believed and received God's Spirit, there will be visible evidence of His presence in your life.

Read Acts 19:8-10.

Paul continued his work in Ephesus by going to the synagogue, which was a strategy and pattern for him throughout his missionary journeys. These verses give us a glimpse into Paul's passion and commitment as both an evangelist and a teacher. As you read verse 8, you can sense Paul's zeal. In verse 9, we see Paul's discernment and wisdom through his awareness of when to move on. And in verse 10, we see Paul's commitment. He was committed to teaching, discipling, and evangelizing in the region over a period of time.

- **What might verse 9 warn us against?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
The Holy Spirit transforms our lives through the gospel.

Acts 19:1-7

"The passage shows how the Pauline mission worked to include those who have responded but still have something to learn. Luke also reinforced the idea that John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus."[1]

"John's disciples surely would have been acquainted with the Spirit and especially with his teaching that with the coming of the Messiah the Spirit would be poured out (cf. Luke 3:16). What they would not be aware of, if they had not heard of Jesus' death and resurrection and of the event at Pentecost, was that this proclamation of John had been fulfilled in Christ. Evidently, that was this group. They had not heard that the Spirit had been poured out. They were unaware of Pentecost."[2]

"Paul's statement is v. 4 is the critical point. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, preparatory to the coming of the Messiah. John's entire role as forerunner was to prepare the people for the Messiah's coming. The Messiah had indeed come, and he is Jesus. Thus, to be a true disciple of John was to confess Jesus, for he is the one whom John had heralded."[3]

Activity

Put the students into small groups. They are to imagine that the "Love never changes, but love changes everything" line is a tagline for an upcoming movie, TV series, music album, art gallery, or book of poetry. They are to create a snippet from whichever medium they choose; for example, they might act out a trailer for a movie or TV series, or they might compose a verse from a song or poem, or a drawing or painting from the art gallery. Give them a few minutes to create and then share their ideas.

Once they've shared, point out that in today's session, we saw that God's love never changes, but it changes us; we saw the gospel pursue the power of transformation in the Ephesians burning their pagan books and devoting themselves to the Lord. Ask them to share examples of how God's love, whether in Acts 19 or in our world today, never changes, but how it changes us.

1. *Darrell L. Bock, Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids (Mich.), MI: Baker Academic, 2007).*
2. *John B. Polhill, Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary), vol. 26 (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub Group, 2011).*
3. *Ibid.*

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 8, DDG)

63. Personality of the Holy Spirit

The Bible not only affirms the full divinity of the Holy Spirit but also His personhood. Many people have mistakenly believed that the Spirit is a force or power, not a person. However, Scripture affirms His personhood by acknowledging that He is treated as a person (Acts 5:3; 7:51; Heb. 10:29), acts like a person (John 14:26, 15:26; Rom. 8:14), has attributes of a person (1 Cor. 2:10-11; Eph. 4:30), and acts in personal ways (Isa. 63:10; Acts 13:2). In addition to these, the Bible also affirms that Christians relate to Him personally (Acts 5:3-4; 7:51).

TEACHING PLAN

It is critical to respond to God's word promptly. Paul sought to persuade the people of Ephesus for three months, but their rejection of the Word led to a hardening. When we know God is speaking to us and we resist His word, we don't stay the same; we grow calloused and hard-hearted. This hardening makes it more difficult to respond later, and we may become so calloused that we do not feel conviction anymore. So, verse 9 stands as a sobering warning—do not harden your heart; rather, respond to God when He is speaking to you.

Read Acts 19:18-20.

Paul's work in Ephesus demonstrates the power of the gospel to transform people from every religious background. He began with disciples familiar with the teachings of John the Baptist, then moved to a Jewish synagogue, and then to those involved in demonic witchcraft. God's messengers should know their audience and teach accordingly. Our teaching and preaching, like Paul's, should be versatile enough to reach those who are familiar with the Scriptures and those who have very little understanding of the Scriptures. We should be emboldened to speak, knowing that the message of the gospel transcends every culture and context.

▪ How can we teach the Bible in a way that is mindful of those who are churched and unchurched?

First, we must believe that the Bible is relevant and the gospel is powerful enough to reach anyone. We don't make the Bible relevant, and we should never substitute its message for a more culturally appealing alternative. Yet, we should contextualize the message for our audience. The best summary of biblical teaching can be found in Nehemiah 8:8, where early Christians read from the Law and explained its meaning so that the people could understand. Our goal should be to make the message clear and understandable. For unchurched people, this means that we have to be careful about defining terms and not using Christian lingo that we assume everyone understands.

Jesus saves us where we are and as we are, but He never leaves us the way He found us. The gospel transforms. The text tells of how the new believers publicly confessed and turned away from their sinful lifestyles. Their hearts had been transformed to love Christ and His kingdom more than sin or money. Despite the enormous financial investment they had in that lifestyle, they demonstrated the sincerity of their faith by forsaking their sins. But this kind of public confession of sinful practices also shows us that Paul didn't merely share the gospel message; He created a gospel culture—a church community where it was safe to confess and be honest about their sins.

▪ What does it take to have a gospel culture?

At the most basic level, it takes the Spirit of God at work in His people. This is supernatural, and we can't manufacture it. But there are some things we can do to promote a gospel culture. First, we must preach a gospel that makes God's grace sound as big and inviting as it truly is. People must believe that their standing before God is entirely in Christ and not in their work. Second, we must sense the deadliness of sin. It has to feel more dangerous to stay in the darkness than it does to walk into the light. And finally, more than just preaching grace, church leaders and members need to embody grace. We should never minimize the seriousness of sin, but we should magnify the power of the cross. To do so, it's not enough just to say that God unconditionally loves people; as His ambassadors, we must create a culture where people sense and know that we do, too.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
The Holy Spirit transforms our lives through the gospel.

Acts 19:8-10

"The term 'kingdom of God' is another way that Luke presents Paul's case for Jesus as the Messiah who fulfills promise…Paul preaches Jesus and the kingdom. For Paul, the two are bound up together in the gospel."[4]

"For though some were affected with and convinced by the arguments the apostle used, others were but the more hardened and remained incredulous: for the Gospel, while it is the savour of life unto life to some, it is the savour of death unto death, to others; as the sun melts the wax, and hardens the clay."[5]

Acts 19:18-20

"It is all too true that too many of us hate our sins but cannot leave them. Even when we do seek to leave them, there is the lingering and the backward look. There are times in life when treatment must be surgical, when only the clean and final break will suffice."[6]

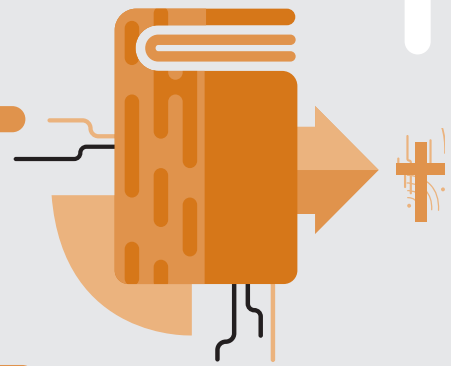
"Spiritual health never grows as the result of acting like something you're not. Spiritual health grows in the soil of honesty."[7]

"The Ephesian abandonment of magic was not without some personal sacrifice…If the piece of silver concerned is the drachma, the most common Greek silver coin, that would come to about $35,000 in current silver value. Translated into terms of living standards, however, the sum was greater still, since the drachma was an average day's wage."[8]

4. Bock, Acts
5. John Gill, Commentary on Acts 19:4 (The New John Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible) https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/geb/acts-19.html. 1999.
6. William Barclay, The Acts of the Apostles. The Daily Study Bible series, 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 157
7. Paul Tripp, Twitter post, August 26, 2017, 6:04 a.m., https://twitter.com/PaulTripp/status/901399997706625024
8. Polhill, Acts

(p. 9, DDG) Christ Connection

When Paul arrived in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, he encountered people with various understandings of salvation. Paul faithfully shared the gospel with all he met and persevered in his efforts, resulting in many trusting in Jesus and experiencing changed lives. Paul's faithful perseverance was a testimony to Jesus, who faithfully endured to bring salvation to the world.



LESSON 100: TEACHABLE
PERSEVERING IN THE MISSION

Acts 19:1-10, 18-20

PERSEVERING IN THE MISSION

The Holy Spirit transforms our lives through the gospel.

JESUS CONNECTION

Paul faithfully shared the gospel with everyone he met and persevered in his efforts. The lives of many were transformed as they trusted in Jesus. Paul's example pointed to Jesus, who faithfully endured to bring salvation to the world.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

TEACHABLE – Being willing to change my mind and actions as I learn.

HEAD

The disciples in Ephesus believed in the message of repentance for sin. What part of the gospel message were they missing?

How did the Holy Spirit change the hearts of those who trusted in the good news about Jesus?

HEART

When we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit will reveal where our thoughts or beliefs are different from what God says. How can we show a teachable response when this happens?

Being teachable means being willing to change your mind. On a scale of 1 to 10, how willing are you to change your mind, generally? What makes it easier or harder to change your mind?

HANDS

A teachable person is willing to change so they are more in line with what is true and right. For the situations below, decide if the person is showing a teachable attitude. If not, what would it look like to be teachable?

- The instructor shows a shorter way to do the math, but you like your way better.
- Your older sister offers to help you get organized so you stop losing your homework, so you let her show you how she stays organized.
- You're reading a book that makes a bunch of points you don't like, so you stop reading it entirely.